

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A medicine supply apparatus which comprises

a plurality of tablet cases for accommodating medicines, provided within a case accommodating section of a main body;

a chute through which medicines discharged from the tablet cases pass;

a hopper provided below the chute; and

a charging device for charging medicines received by the hopper into a container such as a bag or a bottle,

the medicine supply apparatus comprising:

identification means that is provided at each of the tablet cases and has identification information for identifying the tablet case; and

a reader for reading, in a non-contact manner, the identification information in the identification means for the tablet cases provided within the case accommodating section.

2. A medicine supply apparatus which comprises a plurality of tablet cases for accommodating medicines and a case accommodating section for accommodating the plurality of tablet cases and which selects a tablet case accommodating a designated medicine, takes the medicine out of the tablet case, and charges the same into a container,

the medicine supply apparatus comprising:

an identifier that is provided at each of the tablet cases and indicates identification information for the tablet case; and

a reader for reading, in a non-contact manner, the identification information indicated by the identifiers for the tablet cases provided within the case accommodating section,

wherein selection of the tablet case accommodating the designated medicine is controlled on the basis of the identification information read by the reader.

3. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising a control device for controlling discharge of medicine from tablet cases on the basis of the identification information read by the reader.

4. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 3, further comprising an information output device, wherein the control device outputs information about exchange of tablet cases to the information output device on the basis of the identification information read by the reader.

5. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 4, wherein the information about exchange of tablet cases includes information indicating medicines to be accommodated within the case accommodating section.

6. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 4, wherein the information about exchange of tablet cases includes information for

indicating the accommodated positions of the tablet cases accommodating medicines which are not designated among the tablet cases accommodated within the case accommodating section, as exchangeable medicines.

7. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 4, wherein the information output device is a display device.

8. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 2, wherein the identifier is an optically readable identification code provided on the surface of each of the tablet cases, and the reader is an optical sensor for reading the identification code.

9. A medicine supply apparatus which comprises a plurality of tablet cases, each of which has an accommodating container for accommodating medicine and a discharge drum for discharging the medicine from the accommodating container,

the medicine supply apparatus comprising:

a plurality of motors for driving the discharge drums; and

a control device that rotates the motor forward to discharge medicine from the accommodating container,

wherein the control device performs an abnormality detection operation in which the motor is rotated in reverse for a predetermined period of time which is sufficiently shorter than a time interval during which medicine is discharged and then rotated forward for the

predetermined period of time and determines disconnection of the motor on the basis of an energized current for the motor during the abnormality detection operation.

10. A medicine supply apparatus which comprises a plurality of tablet cases for accommodating medicines and discharges a designated medicine from a selected tablet case,
the medicine supply apparatus comprising:

a plurality of tablet cases, each of which includes an accommodating container for medicine, a discharging device for discharging medicine from the accommodating container by a discharging operation, and a drive motor which is coupled to the discharging device so as to be able to drive the discharging device and which is rotated in a predetermined direction to make the discharging device perform the discharging operation; and

a control device for controlling rotation of the driving motors,

wherein the control device has an abnormality detection mode in which at least one of the driving motors is driven for a predetermined period of time which is shorter than a time required for the motor to be rotated for discharging medicine, an energized current for the motor is measured, and an abnormality of the motor is detected on the basis of the measured value.

11. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 10, wherein the discharging device is formed in a substantial drum configuration, and

medicine is discharged from the accommodating container by the driving motor being rotated in the predetermine direction.

12. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 10, wherein abnormality of the motor includes disconnection of the motor.

13. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 10, wherein the abnormality detection mode comprises a forward rotation mode in which the discharging device is rotated in a predetermine direction and a reverse rotation mode in which the discharging device is rotated in a direction opposite to the predetermined direction, and the reverse rotation mode precedes the forward rotation mode.

14. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 10, wherein the control device performs the abnormality detection mode for a plurality of driving motors in turn.

15. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 10, further comprising a display device, wherein the control device controls the display device to display information indicating driving motors in which abnormalities are detected in the abnormality detection mode.

16. A medicine supply apparatus which comprises a plurality of tablet cases for accommodating medicines, provided within a main body, a chute through which medicines discharged from the tablet cases pass, a

hopper provided below the chute, and a charging device for charging medicines received by the hopper into a container such as a bag or a bottle,

the medicine supply apparatus comprising:

a control device for adding up the operating time or the frequency of operation for each of parts that wear out provided within the main body,

wherein if the operating time or frequency of operation for a part that wears out approximates a predetermined durability limit or reaches the same, the control device performs a predetermined failure prediction operation.

17. A medicine supply apparatus which comprises a plurality of tablet cases for accommodating medicines, and which discharges medicine from a selected tablet case and charges the medicine into a packaging container to supply the medicine, the medicine supply apparatus comprising a plurality of operating elements operated by being energized,

the medicine supply apparatus comprising:

a control device for controlling the operations of the operating elements; and

a storage medium for storing durability limit values for the operating elements,

wherein the control device stores data indicating the operating time or the frequency of operation for operating elements in the storage

medium.

18. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the data includes a cumulative value for the operating time or the frequency of operation of an operating element from when an operating element started to be used.

19. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 17, further comprising a diagnostic mode for an operating element, wherein in the diagnostic mode, the control device compares, with respect to at least one operating element, its durability limit value and its cumulative value and performs a predetermined failure prediction operation on a basis of the result of comparison.

20. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 19, further comprising a display device, wherein the control device controls the display device to display, on the basis of the result of the comparison, an operating element whose cumulative value has reached a predetermined value determined based on its durability limit value.

21 A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 17, wherein each of the tablet cases includes a driving motor for discharging medicine accommodated therein, and the operating element includes the driving motor.

22. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 17, further comprising a shutter for temporarily holding medicines discharged from tablet cases, prior to being accommodated in a packaging container, wherein the operating element includes the shutter.

23. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 17, further comprising a thermal sealing device for sealing a packaging container into which medicine is charged, wherein the operating element includes the thermal sealing device.

24. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 17, further comprising a printing mechanism for printing predetermined items onto a packaging container, wherein the operating elements includes the printing mechanism.

25. A medicine supply apparatus which comprises a plurality of tablet cases for accommodating medicines and charges medicines discharged from the tablet cases into a container such as a bag or a bottle, the medicine supply apparatus comprising:

a printer for printing on the container or a label for the container, wherein the printer has a color printing function.

26. A medicine supply apparatus which comprises a plurality of tablet cases for accommodating medicines, discharges medicine from a selected tablet case, and charges the medicine into a packaging

container to supply the medicine,

the medicine supply apparatus comprising:

a printing mechanism provided so as to print predetermined items about medicine to be charged into a packaging container onto the packaging container,

wherein the printing mechanism is capable of printing with two or more different colors.

27. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 26, wherein the packaging container has a label attached thereto, and the printing mechanism prints predetermined items on the label.

28. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 26, wherein the printing mechanism comprises ink ribbons holding thermal transfer ink material and prints by heating the ink ribbons to transfer the ink material.

29. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 26, wherein the predetermined items include indication of time slots in which medicine charged into a packaging container should be taken.

30. A medicine supply apparatus according to claim 26, wherein the printing mechanism prints the time slots in which medicine should be taken with different colors for each of the time slots.